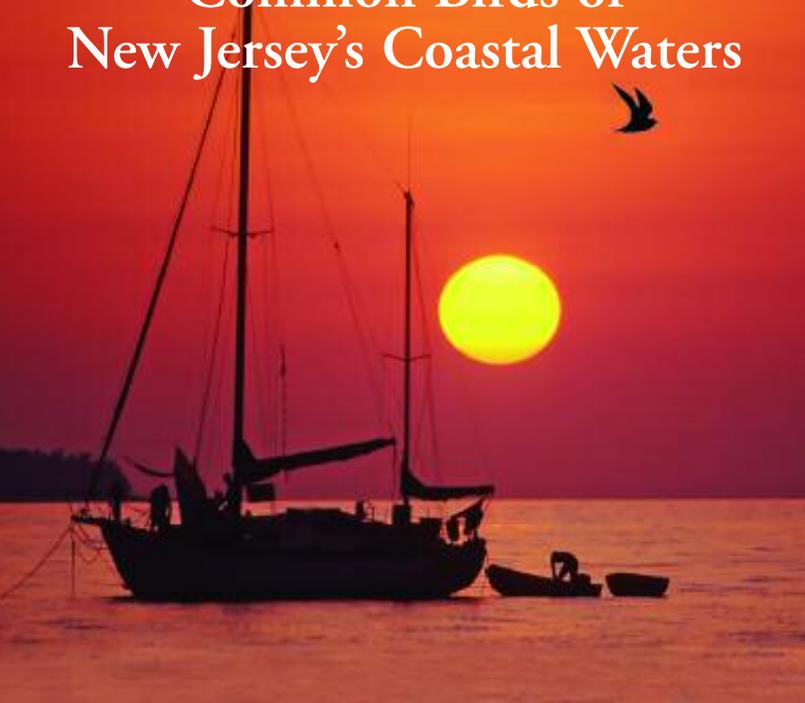


# Birding for Boaters

## Common Birds of New Jersey's Coastal Waters



The **New Jersey Audubon Society** (NJAS) fosters environmental awareness and a conservation ethic among New Jersey's citizens; protects New Jersey birds, mammals, other animals and plants, especially endangered and threatened species and promotes preservation of New Jersey's valuable natural habitats. To become a member of NJAS or to learn more about the organization, call 908-204-8998 or visit [www.njaudubon.org](http://www.njaudubon.org)

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The I BOAT NJ Program provides grant funds to selected eligible applicants to promote, improve and enhance the marine industry in the State of New Jersey for the benefit of the general boating public.

[www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/maritime/marine\\_trades\\_IBOAT.shtm](http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/maritime/marine_trades_IBOAT.shtm)

For more information about where to go and what to do in New Jersey, go to [www.state.nj.us/travel](http://www.state.nj.us/travel) or call **1800VISITNJ**.



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**New Jersey enjoys a wide variety** of distinct habitats from highland mountains, to pineland forests, to sandy beaches, to scenic rivers and windswept bayshore marshlands. In fact, due to its coastal location on the Atlantic flyway, its relatively small size and undeniable abundance of wildlife, it is New Jersey that boasts the highest density of wildlife per square mile of any state in the nation! New Jersey, the fourth smallest state, hosts over 340 bird species, 90 mammal species, 79 reptile and amphibian species and over 400 fish species in its 8,722 square miles.

New Jersey's ocean coastline extends approximately 125 miles from Sandy Hook in the north to Cape May in the south. Additionally, about 150 square miles of wetland habitats are affected by tidal waters associated with Raritan and Newark Bays, New York Harbor and the Delaware Estuary. Specific birds are associated with these wetland habitats. Some of these birds are residents— living in the state all year round, but the vast majority are migrant species that either pass through our state on their way to other places or they come here to nest.

This introductory brochure identifies 28 common coastal bird species you might see while enjoying a day on your boat. Several of these have been designated "threatened" or "endangered" which affords them extra protection beyond what is already given to all migratory birds. These are by no means the *only* birds you will see along our coastline. For a more complete list of New Jersey birds and/or a recommendation for a bird identification guide, contact your local New Jersey Audubon center — [www.njaudubon.org](http://www.njaudubon.org).

*Safe boating and  
happy birding!*

# Open Water



**American Black Duck** – this black-bodied, tan-headed duck, about the size of a Mallard is common during the cooler months and nests along our coast. Look for white underwing flashes when it flies.



**Double-crested Cormorant** – long aerial lines of these black birds can be seen during migration; individuals are found along the coast year-round. At close range note the orange facial skin and boldly-colored eyes. They often stand erect with outstretched wings.



**Osprey (Threatened)** – this “fish hawk” catches its food by plunging feet first into the water. They can be identified in flight by their w-shaped wing pattern and black and white heads. Ospreys will nest on manmade platforms as well as cell phone towers, channel markers and buildings.

# Wetlands



**Clapper Rail** – a secretive chicken-like bird of the salt marsh which is usually heard more than seen. Listen for their resonant “kek-kek-kek” call that speeds up. Best time to see them is at low tide when they venture onto mudflats.



**Glossy Ibis** – an exotic-looking wading bird with an iridescent bronze, black, and green body and long, sickle-shaped bill. During spring and summer, colonies of Glossy Ibis are found in several locations of the Intracoastal Waterway.



**Black-crowned Night-Heron (Threatened)** – mostly nocturnal, these birds become active around dusk and can often be heard making a loud “quawk” call. Note the bird’s black back and cap, thick neck and shorter-legged stance than other herons and egrets.



**Great Blue Heron** – a familiar “crane-like” bird of the marsh. Their distinctive profile includes long legs, an s-curved neck, shaggy breast feathers, and bluish-gray feathers. They eat a wide variety of animals including fish, frogs, rodents, and small birds.



**Great Egret** – a white bird with a yellow beak, similar in size and shape to the Great Blue Heron. They feed by standing statue-like and then striking prey quickly. Once hunted for its exquisite breeding plumes, this species has made a remarkable comeback.



**Snowy Egret** – much smaller than the Great Egret, this species is white with a black bill, and black legs with bright golden-yellow feet. Snowy Egrets are active feeders, shuffling their “golden slippers” through shallow water to stir up the bottom and expose prey.



**Marsh Wren** – a loud, bubbling song often reveals the presence of this small, brownish bird. They are found in a variety of well-vegetated wetlands, often perching on reeds, with tails in the air.



**Red-winged Blackbird** – with a black body and bold red shoulders, the male of this species is an obvious resident of coastal habitats. Females are more camouflaged, with streaked brown plumage. Males make a distinctive “konk-a-ree” sound.



**Tree Swallow** – a small, glossy, blue-backed bird that eats mostly insects. During early fall, huge flocks gather along barrier islands and coastal marshes before migrating south for the winter. During migration, if insects are scarce, they will also eat bayberries.

# Beaches/Mudflats



**American Oystercatcher** – a long and flattened orange bill, black head and back, white underparts, and flesh-colored legs identify this large shorebird. Nesting on undisturbed beaches and marshes, oystercatchers break through clam shells with a chisel-pointed bill.



**Willet** – easy to identify in flight with a bold black-and-white wing pattern, this species vigorously and loudly defends its nesting territory from all intruders, saying “I’m-a-Willet. I’m-a-Willet!” Willets feed on a variety of worms and crustaceans along beaches and wetlands.



**Sanderling** – the classic gray and white sandpiper often seen playing “chicken” with waves along our beaches, this Arctic-nesting shore-bird can be seen along the coast from July to May.



**Piping Plover (Endangered)** – this beach nester is a sparrow-sized shorebird that arrives in March and departs in September. Found almost exclusively on ocean side beaches and sand flats, this bird’s camouflaged coloration makes it difficult to see.



**Laughing Gull** – abundant along the coast, this smallish gull is a familiar sight anywhere along the Jersey shore from March to November. Its distinctive “ha’ha’ha” call gives the bird its name. The largest nesting colony in the world is near Stone Harbor.



**Herring Gull** – a common year-round resident of the shore, this species takes four years to reach maturity and shows a variety of plumages. Young birds are mostly brown, slowly changing to the white-headed and gray-backed adult over time.



**Great Black-backed Gull** – the largest gull in the world, this species’ populations increased greatly in NJ. Young birds are checkered brown and white while adults are black-backed and white bodied with a powerful yellow bill.



**Least Tern (Endangered)** – this little tern nests locally from Sandy Hook to Cape May. It can be separated from other terns by its small size and yellow bill.



**Common Tern** – smaller and more graceful than gulls, this species nests on coastal islands and protected beaches. They hunt for small fish by hovering over the water, then diving. Note the pointy wings, forked tail, and black cap that help distinguish it from gulls.



**Royal Tern** – this species is larger than Common Tern and has a small black crest and orange bill. After nesting in the mid-Atlantic this species spends late summer and fall along the Jersey shore. They feed on small fish by aerial dives.



**Black Skimmer (Endangered)** – best known for its feeding style. Flying just above the surface, they cut the water with their elongated, knife-like lower bill. This species nests on undisturbed beaches and remote islands in our coastal



waterways. Listen for their barking call while the birds forage around sunrise and sunset.

## Marinas



**Barn Swallow** – often nesting around old buildings and docks, these small, insect-eating birds have a forked tail, orange underparts, and a blue back.



**Belted Kingfisher** – easily recognizable by its blue upperparts, long bill, and shaggy crest, this bird perches conspicuously near water and hover-hunts for small fish.



**Boat-tailed Grackle** – found only along the coast, this large member of the blackbird family nests in salt marshes and eats small fish and crustaceans. During winter they form large flocks and may be found in residential areas, marinas, and cities.



**Fish Crow** – almost identical to American Crow, these birds can be distinguished by their nasal “uh-oh” call and coastal distribution. Fish Crows are common scavengers along New Jersey’s coastline.



**Turkey Vulture** – with a featherless red head, huge silvery wings, and v-shaped flight silhouette, this scavenger is a common sight anywhere along the Jersey Shore. They locate food using a keen sense of smell.



Use the check boxes to record your bird sightings!

## Bird-friendly Boating Practices

- Minimize boat and personal watercraft wakes, especially in shallow water areas. Boat wakes can cause shoreline erosion, increase turbidity, and damage important sea grasses that provide nesting and foraging sites for a variety of estuary species.
- Take advantage of pump-out facilities—do not discharge wastewater holding tanks into our waterways. Obtain a free guide showing locations of all New Jersey's pumpout stations by contacting NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife's Clean Vessel Act Office at 609-748-2056 or at [www.njfishandwildlife.com/cvadir.htm](http://www.njfishandwildlife.com/cvadir.htm)
- Keep trash in secure containers and dispose of it on land. Floatable trash can be mistaken by fish, turtles, and birds as food. Ingesting such items may cause death.
- Dispose of monofilament fishing line, hooks and lures in a proper manner. Birds and other animals may get tangled in the line.
- Maintain your boat engine to minimize oil leaks. Use a bilge pillow or other oil absorbent materials to reduce oil being pumped into waterways along with bilge water.
- Avoid approaching nest colonies of plovers, terns, and skimmers. Usually these are roped off to prevent human disturbance. When birds leave the nest for any length of time fledglings may die of exposure to heat/cold or be vulnerable to predation by gulls and crows.

NOTE: The NJ Department of Environmental Protection maintains a current animal rehabilitation list. In the event you find an injured bird or animal, this list can be accessed at the NJ DEP website—  
[www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/rehablst.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/rehablst.htm).

## Tips on How to Identify a Bird

In order to identify a bird, one must be willing to watch it. Binoculars help, but are not necessary. Most birdwatchers use the following guidelines to help identify a bird they don't know.

**Size.** Determine if the bird is bigger or smaller than other species — especially ones you already know. Is it the size of a gull, a crow, a sparrow, a robin?

**Shape.** Does the bird have an overall streamlined shape and structure or is it round and dumpy? Is it long-legged, long-necked or just the opposite? These are questions you can pose and answer as you look at an unknown bird.

**Behavior.** What is the bird doing? Is it walking slowly or running along the beach? How does the bird feed? Each bird species has its own body language and this can be used to help identify it — even from a distance.

**Habitat.** The type of habitat in which you see the bird can often help narrow down the candidates. Note that the brochure associates particular birds with particular habitats. Although these are suggested, birds move around and there is often overlap in habitat use.

**Coloration.** Look at overall color or color combinations to help identify bird species. Does the bird have a particular striking pattern to its wings? Does it show speckling or striping or some other kind of distinctive feather features?

**Sound.** Most birds have specific call notes they use to communicate with each other or to sound the alarm for predators and/or disturbance. One can learn to identify a bird species just by the call.

